

Lloyd Street Synagogue
Lloyd and Watson Streets
Baltimore
Baltimore City County
Maryland

HABS No. MD-190

HABS
MD
4-BALT
117-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office, Division of Design and Construction
143 South Third Street
Philadelphia 6, Pennsylvania

LLOYD STREET SYNAGOGUE

HABS
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Location: Lloyd and Watson Streets, Baltimore, Baltimore City County, Maryland.

Present Use: Synagogue.

Brief Statement of Significance: This simple Greek Revival building was designed by Robert Carey Long, Jr. and is the first synagogue ever built in Maryland.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The Baltimore Hebrew Congregation in the City of Baltimore was incorporated by an act of the Maryland legislature on January 29, 1830, the first Jewish congregation to be chartered in the state. It met at various locations until the completion of the Lloyd Street building.

The charter members of the congregation were John M. Dyer, Moses Millem, Lewis Silver, Levi Benjamin and Joseph Osterman. "The early membership was largely made up of Jews coming from Holland, especially of those who had previously emigrated to the West Indies . . . Noteworthy is it that the time of the building of the Lloyd Street Synagogue in 1844, the Jews of Jamaica contributed \$170.00 toward the building fund . . . The Congregation was organized by orthodox Jews, and for many decades the services were carried on according to the old orthodox ritual."¹

Apparently begun in 1844, the Synagogue was actually consecrated on September 26, 1845. A remarkably complete description of the building was given in the Baltimore American, Thursday morning, September 25th, 1845, which is the best known evidence for its original condition and bears repeating at length:

"NEW JEWISH SYNAGOGUE . . . The building is in the Grecian style, of the Doric order, 50 feet front by 75 feet deep including the portico. The front has a portico of four columns standing out from the hall /wall? and finished with a pediment with one large entrance doorway. The sides are finished with four windows having bold architraves and cornices, and the sash arranged in diamond lights. The whole exterior is painted in one uniform stone tint.

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1. Rabbi Adolf Guttmacher A History of the Baltimore Hebrew Congregation, 1830-1905 (Baltimore: The Lord Baltimore Press, 1905), pp. 22-23. Hereinafter cited as Guttmacher.

"The basement story is half underground and half above, and is entered from areas at the sides. It is divided into rooms for schools and meetings. The main floor of the church is fitted up with pews, and has a gallery extending on three sides of the church appropriated entirely to the female portion of the congregation. The eastern wall has a round window filled with stained glass directly over the ark. The ark to contain the law is a semi-circular temple with Corinthian pillars and ribs, and carved ornaments on the roof and the tables of the law in front. The doors are enriched with carvings and slide on rollers around the curve of the sides. On each side of the ark is an elevated platform with rich finished armchairs for the President and Vice President of the congregation. In front is the reading desk and seats for the readers, of solid walnut. The window over the ark bears the shape of a double star, of the most beautiful variegated colors, illustrating the shield of David, in the centre of which is a representation of a Grecian Corinthian Acanthus. The spaces between the points of the star are filled with Grecian leaves, the whole surrounded by a circle to correspond. The work upon this window was performed, we understand, by R. Carey Long, Esq. On the two tables in front of the ark the Ten Commandments are inscribed, upon a white background, in letters of gold, in the Hebrew language, the carving of which is the work of Mr. Hays.

"Immediately below the tables and extending across the front, hangs a curtain of rich crimson velvet, in the centre of which has been wrought a golden crown, with two Hebrew characters in gold, signifying that the crown is the 'crown of religion'. This curtain is heavily bordered with gold and furnished with gold cord and tassels, and is the work of Miss Wolf. The crown is beautifully set with stones representing topaz, garnet, etc. Pendant in front of the ark are two crimson velvet curtains handsomely decorated, which are made to draw apart so as to exhibit the interior, in which is contained the Pentateuch . . . These curtains, with the other upholstery of the settees, etc. were done by Mrs. A. L. Boyle. The whole of the floor is covered with rich carpeting of a very handsome pattern, furnished by Mr. Conrad, and laid down by C. W. Keller. The iron work of the building was done by Messrs. Weglein, Bates and Wilson.

"The windows are tinted of a golden colour and diffuse a warm glow of light in the interior. The interior woodwork is painted of a warm drab color, and the walls and ceilings, when dry are intended to be finished in fresco. In the rear of the church a building has been erected for a dwelling, and contains a room fitted up for the purpose of religious ablution.

"This building adds another to the architectural attractions of our city, and has been faithfully built by Messrs. Curley & Son, from the design and under the superintendence of Robert Carey Long, Esq., Architect."

A similar article in the Baltimore Sun for September 24th adds a few points, such as that the building is "surrounded with an iron railing on a granite base," that the basement was divided into three rooms, and that it was expected to cost \$20,000 when completed.

Unfortunately, there do not seem to be any manuscript papers concerning this period of the congregation. The Baltimore Hebrew Congregation, now at 7401 Park Heights Avenue, Baltimore, does have manuscript Proceedings beginning in 1851 which illuminate the later career of the synagogue until it was sold on February 3rd, 1889.

The only major change to the building was in 1860 when it was lengthened by 60 feet and a new Ark installed. On January 28, 1860, the Chairman of the Building Committee, Mr. M. Steigerwald, laid before the congregation meeting a plan for alterations which would cost \$5,000. The plan was approved, and work proceeded from about July, and was completed and the building reconsecrated on September 14th of the same year. Again the Baltimore American reported the changes in considerable detail, September 15th, 1860, as follows:

"Four rows of pews commence at the entrance or front of the church, and extend as far as the middle, where a comparatively open space is formed immediately in front of the ark. On each side of this space a row of pews is continued till within a few feet of the end of the building. Within the space left in the centre of the building, the desk, handsomely draped in purple velvet with bullion bordering, is raised. In front of the desk a number of semi-circular benches are placed for the choir . . .

"The ark itself is built up at the extreme end of the synagogue and rests upon a broad spacious platform, approached by a short flight of steps, commencing within a few feet of the choristers seats . . . In shape it somewhat resembles the Corinthian portico of a large mansion. The columns adorning its front are fluted and touched with gilding. The capitols (sic) of each are elaborately wrought and tastefully gilded and contribute greatly to the effect . . . Upon the top of all is placed a stained glass representation of the stone tablets delivered to Moses on Mt. Sinai, with the Hebrew characters of the Ten Commands of God inscribed thereon."

To these important remarks may be added material drawn from the manuscript Proceedings, from pages 165 to 204. The architect for the changes was William H. Reasin of Baltimore, a well known minor architect. He received \$250 for his work. James Curley, the original builder, also contracted for this job. He was paid \$3,256 which included nearly all the costs except for some upholstering, a new carpet, painting (\$265), a chandelier and gas fixture (\$305), and miscellaneous

small amounts. The "Ladies of the Lloyd Street Congregation" presented "the magnificent velvet curtain which Decorates the Ark," and were gratefully thanked. H. I. Gemhart provided the stained glass Tablets of Moses for \$55, and perhaps this included some other glass.

From Guttmacher we learn (page 44) that in 1870 some of the congregation objected to the fact that the Trustees had removed "the lattice work that screened the gallery occupied by women," and about 1873 a pipe organ was installed (page 59).

The Baltimore Hebrew Congregation possesses a photograph, a copy of which is included in this report, which is titled in Guttmacher "The Ark (Lloyd Street Synagogue) (Now at the Madison Avenue Temple)" This is obviously the 1860 Ark, as described in the newspaper report, but the photograph must have been taken at the Madison Avenue Temple. It is no longer in that building, and has not been located elsewhere.

According to the Proceedings for January 7th, 1861 (page 204) the building committee was instructed "to have the doors opened on each side of the last Isles (sic) of the old part of the Synagogue."

This is all the evidence we have of structural and decorative changes through the years. In 1889 the building was sold to a Roman Catholic parish, and at some later date returned to the present Jewish congregation, Shomrei Meshmeres Hakodesh. Unfortunately, the present occupants seem to know little about its history in recent years, but they do not remember any significant changes.

From the above evidence and from close inspection of the building, the following points seem to be clear:

1. The exterior, including some of the iron fence, is essentially original except for the additional thirty feet on the eastern end of 1860. The 1845 report speaks of "one large entrance doorway," but now there are two smaller doorways flanking the large one. These may have been installed in 1861.
2. Most of the pews on the main floor appear to be 1845, and the balcony pews are comparable. The present reading desk has the same turnings as the balusters along the balcony, and the choir seats are as described in the 1860 report. This may be the original desk.
3. The present Ark is relatively new, certainly neither that of 1845 or 1860.
4. The present ceiling is obviously new.

5. The stained glass behind the Ark may very well be that described in the 1845 report, even though it has been moved from its original setting in the older east wall. It matches the 1845 description, and seems to be of the period, although it may have been retouched or repaired.

6. The addition of 1860 has settled somewhat, and its structure is in need of repair. The wooden parts of the portico and door frames need considerable attention. Otherwise the synagogue seems to be in good condition.

Prepared by Wilbur Harvey Hunter, Jr.
Director, The Peale Museum
November 1959

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural Character:

The Lloyd Street Synagogue, dedicated September 26, 1845, is the first synagogue ever built in Maryland. A simple Greek Revival building, with many interesting details, it was designed by Robert Carey Long, Jr. (1810-1849), who was the most important Baltimore architect of the period and a significant figure in the transition from the Neoclassic to the Gothic Revival style.

Except for the lengthening in 1860 and changes in some interior furnishings, the building is little changed from its original condition.

2. Condition of Fabric:

The original walls and interior structure seem sound. The addition of 1860 has settled considerably, leaving a clear crack in the walls at that point. The wooden pediment needs repairs.

B. Detailed Description

In the description, frequent reference will be made to the known historical changes which are documented later in the report.

1. Orientation:

The portico faces west.

2. Foundations:

The foundations are of coarse stone, plastered and lined on the south and west sides only, and capped by a sill of granite. Narrow alleys run along the north and south

foundation walls giving access to the basement. The outer walls of the sunken alleys are also rough masonry with granite sills. The basement story is thus half above grade but the walls are entirely out of the ground. There are five windows and a door in each of these walls, spaced to correspond with the first floor windows.

3. Wall Construction:

Brick in common bond. There are brick pilasters opposite the end columns of the portico. The last thirty feet of the east end was added in 1860 with matching bonds and details; the east end has a round projection. There is a string course above the window enframements and a brick corbeled cornice. The west wall is carried above the gable and pediment as a parapet wall and conforms to the shape of the pediment. The west and south walls are covered with a thin stucco, and painted with lines resembling brick joints. There are obvious cracks where the addition of 1860 was made.

4. Porch:

Four granite piers extend out from the front of the building, serving as the bases for the columns, with three stairs of nine steps each between them. Behind the columns the portico is continuous. Four Doric columns support a simple Doric pediment with guttae, triglyphs and mutules. The shafts appear to be brick, or some such masonry, plastered in flutes. The bottoms of the shafts are covered with sheet metal, probably recent. The abacus' are wooden, and so are all the visible parts of the pediment. The porch ceiling is compartmented and made of lath and plaster.

5. Doorways:

Under the first window on each side is a basement door. Originally, there was only the one large entrance doorway in the front. In 1861 (as indicated on page 4, paragraph 4, of this book) two flanking doors were cut. The wooden framing in a classical style is the same for all, but the center doorway is four or five feet higher. Each entrance has a pair of four panel wooden doors of about the same size. The center pair have above them what seems to be a pair of two panel transom doors, but these do not open. The doorsills are stone, and the hinges are large with concealed plates. The hardware may be of 1860, and perhaps the doors.

6. Windows:

There are six windows on the north and south sides at the main level, each set in a raised brick frame which is finished at the top with a molded brick cornice. Under the stone sills the enframing continues to the granite water

table. The basement windows correspond to those above but have solid paneled shutters.

The sash in both the upper and lower windows are not original. The 1845 newspaper accounts (q.v.) speak of the sash "in diamond lights," and "tinted a golden colour." They are now comprised of four panes of clear glass.

In the west wall are two round windows with clear glass at about the level of the architrave and outside of the pediment. Under the pediment, immediately above the main door, is a triple window with a shallow-arched lintel, also clear glazed. These windows light the vestibule behind the balcony.

In the east wall are three round windows at the same height as those in front. These have leaded colored glass. The center one is exactly as described in the 1845 account. It is likely that these windows were carried from the old wall, and are original. They now have sheet metal hoods for protection.

7. Roof:

The roof is gabled at the same angle as the pediment, carries gutters, and is covered with composition over tin.

8. Chimneys:

There is one sheet metal chimney on the ridge near the front wall. There is no evidence inside of fireplaces, and the building was probably heated by one or more stoves. It now has a rudimentary steam heat system with a basement furnace.

C. Interior

1. Basement:

The floor above is supported by two rows of plain iron columns. The basement is divided into three or four rooms by wooden partitions. One large room is now used for religious services and is more or less furnished for that purpose. The trim is very simple. At the west end a steep enclosed stairway rises to the vestibule.

2. Main Floor:

At the west end is a shallow vestibule separated from the main room by a plastered partition with three light doors. From both ends an enclosed stairway rises to the balcony. The remainder of the floor is open, with rows of stall pews and a reading desk about half-way towards the Ark, which is at the east end. The stall pews appear to be original, as does the reading desk and its railing. The Ark is relatively recent. There are no other rooms on this floor.

3. Balcony:

A wooden balcony runs around the west, north and south sides, supported on cast iron posts of classical design. It has a railing, and contains more pews, some open, and at the west end, stall pews similar to those on the first floor. The west section is stepped up towards two doors which lead into a vestibule similar to the one below. This vestibule is lighted by the front windows mentioned before. The side windows rise above the balcony level.

4. Floors, Wall Finish, Lighting, Etc.:

The floors are of close fitted plank, but in many places covered with linoleum of some kind. Walls are plastered and painted, and have a paneled dado which may not be original. The ceiling is clumsily paneled with some kind of wall board, and the lighting fixtures are early 20th century types. A plaster cornice of simple molding design is next to the ceiling.

D. Other

The front and south side of the exterior is protected by fences and gates. There are two types of iron work in the fencing. The center gate and the fence along the south side are very simple wrought iron work. The other two gates are cast iron of an unusual pattern. The remainder of the front is patterned wrought iron work. Whether the cast iron is older than the wrought iron is not known.

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